DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 552 RC 018 504

AUTHOR Sullivan, Michael E.; Leary, Paul A.
TITLE Perceptions of Rural School Administrators of the Role and Function of Special Education Administrators.
PUB DATE 18 Mar 91
NOTE 14p.; In: Reaching Our Potential: Rural Education in the 90's. Conference Proceedings, Rural Education Symposium (Nashville, TN, March 17-20, 1991); see RC 018 473.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; Mail Surveys; Principals; *Role Conflict; *Role Perception; Rural Schools; *Special Education; Superintendents
IDENTIFIERS West Virginia

ABSTRACT

This study examined expectations, with respect to the role of the special education administrator, held by key administrative personnel within West Virginia's rural school systems. Surveys were sent to all county superintendents, all county special education administrators, and a randomly selected sample of 150 school principals, resulting in 202 responses from a total of 260 individuals surveyed. The survey instrument consisted of 40 specific task descriptions organized and assigned to 7 types of administrative activity. Respondents were asked to rate the perceived performance and the perceived importance of the tasks. Significant differences were found: (1) between special education administrators and principals regarding the perceived performance of 19 tasks; (2) between special education administrators and superintendents regarding the perceived importance of 2 tasks; (3) between special education administrators and principals regarding the perceived degree of importance of 17 tasks; (4) between special education administrators and superintendents regarding the perceived degree of importance of one task. These differences imply potential areas of conflict among rural special education administrators, superintendents, and principals. The greatest potential for conflict exists between the special education administrator and principal. Implications for administrative endorsements and organizational structures are discussed. (KS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED342552

NRSSC PRESENTATION
Presenter: Michael E. Sullivan
Co-Presenter: Paul A. LEary
Day: March 18, 1991
Time: 1:30pm - 2:30pm

Perceptions of Rural School Administrators of the Role and Function of Special Education Administrators

RC018504

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Doris Helge
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Michael E. Sullivan, Ed.D.
Paul A. Leary, Ed.D.
University of West Virginia
College of Graduate Studies
Institute, WV 25112

PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

RC 018504

PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

Problems rural school administrators face differ from those of urban and suburban school administrators (DeYoung, 1987; Marshall, 1984; Massey & Crosby, 1983; Sher, 1983b: Traugh, 1984). Many of these differences thwart the effectiveness of rural school personnel including the special education administrator. School systems in West Virginia, like schools in many rural areas, typically are characterized by relatively small size and by physical and cultural isolation (Massey & Crosby, 1983). To analyze the position of rural school system special education administrator, in an isolated setting with limited human and material resources, we must examine the perceptions of key school administrators regarding that role and function.

According to a survey of the Education Commission of the States in 1974, special education was perceived by governors to be the number one challenge to states (Davis, 1979). Since that survey, rapid growth and sweeping changes in special education have come into being largely as a result of the passage of a major federal law, P.L. 94-142, in 1975. A variety of organizational and administrative problems arose with the adoption of Public Law 94-142, the implementing regulations of Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation act of 1973, and the ever-expanding volume of court cases supporting the rights of the handicapped (Lilly, 1979; Blackhurst and Berdine, 1981). Into this maze of problems entered the special education administrator, a professional educator who had been relatively unknown but whose importance has increased dramatically. Kohl and Marro have written:

> If what is known about organization in general holds true in special education, and there is no reason to believe it does not, the central position around which organizational concerns revolve is that of administration of special education. This person, more than any other, will be involved either directly or indirectly in decisions that affect the lives of millions of people, the spending of billions of dollars, and the organization, administration, and supervision of thousands of programs for students with disabilities (1970:2).

Recognizing the complexities of this position and the level of skills needed, Jones and Wilkerson (1975) observed that the special education administrator is one of the few administrative personnel in the schools who has true K-12 responsibility. Gearheart (1967) wrote that a special education administrator is obviously a key person in the special education unit. Forgnone and Collings (1975) acknowledged the demand for special education administrators to direct special education programs. They stated that, as special education grows and becomes more complex, the

need for leadership becomes imperative. Kern and Mayer (1970) noted the growing complexity of special education and wrote:

> It has become apparent that the complexity of special education demands the leadership of a well-trained, highly qualified professional who is a "specialist" but who must have a wide background of training and expertise in many exceptionalities (p. 128).

Evidence suggests that the role of the special education administrator is still evolving. Even prior to the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, researchers began to suggest that the special education administrator's role needed to reflect that of facilitator, innovator and implementor to accommodate new and increasing demands. These circumstances suggest the potential for conflict caused by role ambiguity and, as such, may reduce the effectiveness of the delivery of services to exceptional students in rural school settings. A number of studies have explored the relationships between role, expectations, and conflict (Getzels and Guba, 1954; Merton, 1957; Gross, Mason and McEachern, 1958; Getzels, Lipham and Campbell, 1968). More recently, Sergiovanni and Carver (1980), Crossland, Fox and Baker (1982, and Sullivan (1986) have explored the same relationships as they related to special education administrator behaviors.

As rural school systems strive to achieve organizational goals, few would question the vital role played by the administrator of special education in this relatively new field. Yet, there appear to be inconsistencies and inconclusiveness concerning the special education administrator's role. Research to clarify this issue has been both minimal and conflicting.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the expectations held by key administrative personnel within West Virginia's rural school systems with respect to the role of the special education administrator. Specifically, what were the existing differences, if any, of perceptions among and within groups of superintendents, principals and special education administrators of the role expectations for the special education administrator in rural school systems in West Virginia? Seven functional areas of administration containing forteen specific tasks (Figure 1) were examined in order to identify potential areas of conflict among and between key rural school system administrators. The responses analyzed were related to both the perceived performance and the perceived importance of these specific tasks.

The specific objective of the study was to generate information which would clarify the following:

1. The relationship between the perceptions of special education administrators and those of principals regarding the role of the special education administrator.

FIGURE I

Administrative Functions - Defined by Specific Tasks

PLANNING	ORGANIZING	STAFFING	DIRECTING	COORDINATING	REPORTING	BUDGETING
1. Developing policies (i.e. identification, placement, transfer) 2. Establishing special education programs 3. Surveying the district for handicapped and gifted students. 4. Planning and providing facilities 5. Planning and providing special equipment and special instructional materials 6. Curriculum planning and development	1. Establishing channels of communication and responsibility 2. Preparing schedules for special education teachers 3. Placement of special classes within school buildings 4. Establishing psychological procedures for identifying handicapped and gifted students 5. Establishing communication with entire school staff concerning referral and diagnostic procedures	1. Recruitment of special education teachers 2. Assistance in the screening of special education teachers 3. Selection of special education teachers 4. Assignment of special education teachers 5. Evaluation of special education teachers 6. Building and maintaining special education staff morale 7. Securing consultant services for the staff	1. Placement of children in special classes 2. Transportation schedules for exceptional children 3. Planning in-service meetings, workshops, etc. 4. Conducting research with exceptional children 5. Directing in-service meetings, workshops, etc. 6. Re-evaluation of exceptional children 7. Providing counseling and guidance services for exceptional children	1. Integrating special education with entire school program 2. Cooperating and communicating with school personnel 3. Communicating with parents and the public 4. Utilizing services of community agencies 5. Utilizing state department personnel as resources 6. Communicating with board of education concerning special education program	1. Completion of state forms 2. Pupil accounting and records 3. Teacher accounting 4. Disseminating research findings 5. Periodic publications made available to parents and the public	1. Preparation of the budget 2. Presentation of budget requests 3. Administering the budget 4. Keeping school personnel informed of budget limits

2. The relationship between the perceptions of special education administrators and those of superintendents regarding the role of the special education administrator.

Procedures

Three groups of West Virginia county school system administrators were chosen to participate in the study. The first group consisted of all fifty-five county superintendents of schools. The second group consisted of all fifty-five individuals identified as county special education administrators. The third group involved a randomly selected sample (N=150) of the state's public school principals.

A demographic questionnaire and a survey instrument were mailed to each participant in the study. The survey instrument consisted of 40 specific tasks organized and assigned to seven types of administrative activity. After all follow-up procedures were completed, forty (72.73 percent) superintendents, fifty-five (100 percent) special education administrators and 107 (71.33 percent) principals returned the questionnaire. Of the 260 individuals surveyed. a total of 202 (77.69 percent) responses were received.

Data generated by the study were assigned response codes, arrayed and processed by using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test all hypotheses. An alpha level of .05 was the criterion used to reject the null hypotheses. In instances where the null hypothesis was rejected, the Scheffe' method of multiple comparisons was used for post hoc analysis. Because the Scheffe' is a very conservative test, it failed to identify statistically significant differences in some cases even though the ANOVA did indicate that differences existed. In these instances, the Duncan Multiple Range Test was applied to pinpoint existing differences.

Major Findings

Analyses of the survey instrument data generated by this investigation have enabled a number of major findings to be identified:

1. There were significant (.05 level) differences among or between the subject groups regarding the perceived performance of twenty-one of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

2. There were significant differences (.05 level) between special education administrators and principals regarding the perceived performance of nineteen of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

3. There were significant differences (.05 level) between special education administrators and superintendents regarding the perceived performance of two of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

4. There were significant differences (.05 level) between principals and superintendents regarding the perceived performance of two of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

5. There were significant (.05 level) differences among or between the three groups regarding the perceived degree of importance assigned to eighteen of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

6. There were significant (.05 level) differences between special education administrators and principals regarding the perceived degree of importance assigned to seventeen of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

7. There were significant (.05 level) differences between special education administrators and superintendents regarding the perceived degree of importance assigned to one of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

8. There were significant (.05 level) differences between principals and superintendents regarding the perceived degree of importance assigned to three of the forty tasks contained in the instrument.

Discussion

An analysis of the data indicated the potential for conflict among or between the three respondent groups. On the average, the three groups surveyed perceived that thirty-two of the forty tasks contained in the instrument fell within the Important - Very Important range. Further analysis also revealed that, on the average, the three groups felt that thirty-four of the forty tasks were being performed. The only task perceived to be of both little importance and also perceived as not being performed was found within the Directing function. This task was entitled Conducting Research with Exceptional Children. This result verified a similar finding in a previous study by Mazor (1977). However, this finding also contradicted that of an earlier study by Loe and Becker (1975) who reported that special education administrators indicated a strong interest in this type of research.

Post hoc analysis indicated significant (.05 level) differences between special education administrators and superintendents on only two performance-related items. They were: (1) Surveying the District for Handicapped and Gifted Students and (2) Establishing Communication with Entire School Staff Concerning Referral and Diagnostic Procedures. Further

analysis indicated significant (.05 level) differences between these two groups regarding perception of importance of task on only one item (Cooperating and Communicating With School Personnel). This finding does not support the study results reported by White (1969) who found many differences of opinion between these two groups. However, this investigation does support the results of studies reported by Hill (1967) and Mazor (1977) who found very little disagreement between superintendents and special education administrators regarding the special education administrator's role.

Post hoc analyses also pinpointed significant (.05 level) differences between principals and superintendents on two performance-related tasks. They were: (1) Planning and Providing Facilities and (2) Integrating Special Education With Entire School Program. Additional analysis indicated significant (.05 level) differences between the two groups regarding perception of importance of three tasks. They were: (1) Developing Policies, (2) Surveying the District for Handicapped and Gifted Students, and (3) Preparation of the Budget. The fact that there were no significant (.05 level) differences between principals and superintendents on thirty-five of forty tasks would generally support the research conducted by Mallek (1970) which indicated similar concordance.

The pairing which may be the major source of potential conflict, because of the number of tasks in which significant (.05 level) differences were found, is that of special education administrator and principal. Post hoc analyses revealed that significant (.05 level) differences of perception regarding performance occurred between these two groups on nineteen of the forty tasks. Further analysis indicated that significant (.05 level) differences of perception regarding degree of importance occurred between the two groups on seventeen of forty tasks. Furthermore, significant (.05 level) differences regarding both perceived performance and perceived degree of importance occurred between the two groups on ten of forty tasks. These ten tasks were:

1. Developing policies (i.e. identification, placement, transfer)
2. Establishing special education programs
3. Curriculum planning and development
4. Establishing channels of communication and responsibility
5. Integrating special education with entire school program
6. Communicating with parents and the public
7. Utilizing resources of community agencies
8. Utilizing state department personnel as resources
9. Preparation of the budget
10. Presentation of budget requests

Generally, these findings support those results presented in similar studies conducted by Carter and Brooks (1974) and Mazor (1977).

Conclusions

A number of major conclusions may be drawn from the analyses of the data generated by the demographic sheet and the survey. They include the following:

1. It may be concluded that each of the three groups of administrators contained a number of individuals who had no teaching experience.

2. It may be concluded that superintendents occupy their present position for a shorter period on the average than do special education administrators and principals.

3. It may be concluded that wide variations exist among the three groups of administrators regarding both formal education administration and special education-related coursework.

4. It may be concluded that the pairing which may be the major source of potential conflict, because of the greatest number of tasks in which significant (.05 level) differences were found, is that of special education administrator and principal.

5. It may be concluded that the ten tasks representing potential conflict on both the perceived performance and degree of importance dimensions are representative of only four administrative functions. Those functions include Planning, Organizing, Coordinating and Budgeting.

Implications

The study described one model for assessing potential areas of conflict among or between rural special education administrators, superintendents, and principals. The fact that the potential for conflict exists should not lead to the assumption that this conflict does indeed occur. The study does, however, provide a starting point for identifying the role which the special education administrator plays in delivering educational programs to exceptional students in rural school systems in West Virginia.

It may be speculated that the lack of formal special education or education administration-related training may contribute to a certain ignorance of the delivery process which in turn results in the potential for conflict identified in the study. Similarly, the fact that a surprising number of each of the three groups of administrators had never taught might also account for some of the potential for conflict. Both circumstances have profound implications if a specialized administrative endorsement for this role eventually emerges.

It is interesting to note that the greatest potential for conflict exists between the special education administrator and principal. As such, actual conflict may occur primarily at the program implementation level. A closer examination of those tasks most representative of actual implementation might be most beneficial in determining whether the potential for conflict is actually realized.

A portion of the potential conflict identified in the study may be more directly related to the organizational relationships which exist among the three positions rather than the fact that the role examined was related to special education. A question which might be legitimately asked is whether or not the special education administrator is primarily a line or staff position.

A related issue may have implications for this and similar studies. That issue revolves around the fact that as special education has grown, it has developed a form of separateness typified by differential funding structures and staffing patterns. This isolation may contribute to some of the differing perceptions identified in the study.

Perhaps the broadest implication of the potential for conflict identified in the study is that if a common perception of the role of the special education administrator does not exist among key administrators, actual conflict may result. This conflict might then cause dissatisfaction among those involved resulting in a reduction in efficiency and effectiveness in meeting mandates for the provision of services to special needs children.

REFERENCES

Blackhurst, A. Edward, & Berdine, William H. An Introduction To Special Education. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981.

Crossland, C.L., Fox, B.J., & Baker, R. Differential perception of role responsibilities among professionals in the public school. Exceptional Children, 48(1982), pp. 536-538.

Davis, William J., Wholeben, B.E., & Ellis, N. A Role Theory Perspective of the System of Delivering Services to Exceptional Children. Paper presented at the 57th Annual International Conference Of The Council For Exceptional Children, Dallas, 1979, p. 1.

DeYoung A.J. (1987). The status of American rural education research: An integrated review and commentary. Review of Educational Research, 57(2), 123-148.

Forgnone, C., & Collings, G.D. State certification endorsement in special education administration. The Journal of Special Education, 9(1975), pp. 5-9.

Gearheart, B.R. Administration of Special Education (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1967), p. 37.

Getzels, J.W., & Guba, E.G. Role, role conflict and effectiveness: An empirical study. American Sociological Review, 19(1954), pp. 164-175.

Getzels, J.W., Lipham, James N., & Campbell, R.F. Educational Administration as a Social Process: Theory Research and Practice. New York: Harper and Row, 1968, pp. 52-78.

Gross, N., McEachern, A.W., & Mason, W.S. Role conflict and its resolutions. In Readings In Social Psychology. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1958.

Hill, R.A. Tasks Of The Special Education Director As Defined By Superintendents Of Schools And By Directors Of Special Education. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Georgia, 1967.

Jones, P.R., & Wilkerson, W.R. Preparing special education administrators. Theory Into Practice, 14(1975), pp. 105-109.

Kerlinger, F.N. Foundations of Behavioral Research. New York: CBS College Publishing, 1986.

Kern, W.H., & Mayer, J.B. Certification of directors of special education programs: The results of a national survey. Contemporary Education, 42(1970), pp. 126-128.

Kohl, J.W., & Marro, T.C. A Normative Study Of The Administrative Position In Special Education. USOE/BEH, Project No. 482266, Final Report, 1970.

Lilly, M. Stephen. Special education: Historical and traditional perspectives. Children With Exceptional Needs: A Survey Of Special Education. New York: Holt, Rinehart And Winston, 1979.

Loe, D.D. & Becker, L.D. Research interests of special education administrators. Phi Delta Kappan, 1975, 56(6), 430.

Mallek, N.S. The Administrator Of Special Education: Role Expectations By Relevant Groups. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, United States International University, 1970.

Marshall, D.B. (1984). From survival to serendipity: Small schools in the 80's. Brandon, Manitoba, Canada: Small Schools Conference.

Massey, S., & Crosby, J. (1983). Special problems, special opportunities: Preparing teachers for rural schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 65(4), 265-268.

Mazor, Gerald. The Role Of The Special Education Administrator As Viewed By Principals, Superintendents And Special Education Administrators. Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston College, 1977.

Merton, R.K. Social Theory And Social Structure. New York: The Free Press, 1957.

Sergiovanni, T.J. & Carver, F.D. The New School Executive: A Theory Of Administration New York: Harper and Row, 1980.

Sher, J.P. (1983b). Education's ugly duckling: Rural schools in urban nations. Phi Delta Kappan, 65(4), 257-262.

Stile, S.W., Abernathy, S.M., & Pettibone, T.J. Training and certification of special education administrators: A 5-year follow-up study. Exceptional Children, 53 (1986), pp. 209-212.

Sullivan, M.E. The Special Education Administrator Role As Perceived By Principals, Superintendents and Special Education Administrators in West Virginia. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, West Virginia University, 1986.

Traugh, C. (1984). Rural high schools: Heart of education in North Dakota. North Dakota Journal of Education, pp. 8-17.

White, C.R. Perceptions Of The Special Education Director's Role As Administrator By Directors And Chief School Administrators. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Indiana University, 1969.